THE

CHARACTER

OF A

METHODIST.

By the Rev. JOHN WESLEY, A. M.
LATE FELLOW OF LINCOLN-COLLEGE, OXFORD.

"NOT AS THOUGH I HAD ALREADY ATTAINED."
PHIL. III. 12.

Sixteenth Edition.

London:

Printed at the Conference-Office, 14, *City-Road*;

By THOMAS CORDEUX, Agent.

Sold by T. BLANSHARD, 14, City-Road, and at all the Methodist Preaching-Houses in Town and Country.

1814.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016 with funding from
Duke University Libraries

https://archive.org/details/characterofmetho00wesl

TO THE READER.

1. SINCE the name first came abroad into the world, many have been at a loss to know what a Methodist is. What are the Principles and Practice of those, who are commonly called by that name; and what the distinguishing marks of this Sect, which is every where spoken against.

2. And it being generally believed, that I was able to give the clearest account of these things, (as having been one of the first to whom that name was given, and the person by whom the rest were supposed to be directed,) I have been called upon in all manner of ways, and with the utmost earnestness, so to do. I yield at last to the continued importunity both of friends and enemies: and do now give the clearest account I can, in the presence of the Lord and Judge of heaven and earth, of the Principles and Practice whereby those who are called Methodists, are distinguished from other men.

3. I say, those who are called Methodists: for let it be well observed, that this is not a name which they take to themselves, but one fixed upon them by way of reproach, without their approbation and consent. It was first given to three or four young men at Oxford, by a student of Christ-Church: either in allusion to the ancient sect of physicians so called, (from their teaching, that almost all diseases might be cured by a specific method of diet and exercise,) or from their observing a more regular method of study and behaviour, than was usual with those of their age and station.

4. I should rejoice, (so little ambitious am I to be at the head of any sect or party,) if the very name might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion. But if that cannot be, at least let those who will use it, know the meaning of the word they use. Let us not always be fighting in the dark. Come, and let us look one another in the face. And perhaps some of you, who hate what I am called, may love what I am, (by the grace of God,) or rather what "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

CHARACTER OF A METHODIST.

1. THE distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines, that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion, is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally. We believe, indeed, that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written Word of God to be the only and sufficient rule, both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the Eternal Supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think, and let think. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist.

2. Neither are words or phrases of any sort. We do not place our religion, or any part of it, in being attached to any peculiar mode of speaking, any quaint or uncommon set of expressions. The most obvious, easy, common words, wherein our meaning can be conveyed, we prefer before others, both on ordinary occasions, and when we speak of the things of God. We never, therefore, willingly or designedly deviate from the most usual way of speaking; unless when we express Scripture truths in Scripture words, (which we presume no Christian will condemn.) Neither do we affect to use any particular expressions of Scripture more frequently than others; unless they are such as

are more frequently used by the inspired writers themselves. So that it is as gross an error, to place the marks of a Methodist in his words, as in opinions of any sort.

3. Nor do we desire to be distinguished by actions, customs, or usages, of an indifferent nature. Our Religion does not lie in doing what God has not enjoined, or abstaining from what he hath not forbidden. It does not lie in the form of our apparel, in the posture of our body, or the covering of our heads; nor yet abstaining from marriage, nor from meats and drinks, which are all good if received with thanksgiving. Therefore, neither will any man who knows whereof he affirms, fix the mark of a Methodist here; in any actions or customs purely indifferent, undetermined by the Word of God.

4. Nor, lastly, is he to be distinguished by laying the whole stress of Religion on any single part of it. If you say, "Yes, he is; for he thinks we are saved by faith alone." I answer, you do not understand the terms. By salvation he means holiness of heart and life. And this he affirms to spring from true faith alone. Can even a nominal Christian deny it? Is this placing a part of Religion for the whole? "Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law." We do not place the whole of Religion (as too many do, God knoweth,) either in doing no harm, or in doing good, or in using the ordinances of God. No, nor in all of them together, wherein we know by experience a man may labour many years, and at the end have no true Religion at all, no more than he had at the beginning. Much less in any one of these; or, it may be in a scrap of one of them: like her who fancies herself a virtuous woman, only because she is not a prostitute: Or he who dreams he is an honest man, merely because he does not rob or steal. May the Lord God of my father preserve me from such a poor, starved Religion as this! Were this the mark of a Methodist, I would sooner choose to be a sincere Jew, Turk, or Pagan.

5. What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist, according to your own account?" I answer: "A Methodist is one, who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him." One who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength." God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out,—"Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee!" "My God and my All! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!"

6. He is, therefore, happy in God, yea always happy as having in him "a well of water springing up into everlasting life, and overflowing his soul with peace and joy." "Perfect love" having now "cast out fear," he "rejoices evermore." He "rejoices in the Lord always," even "in God his Saviour:" and in the Father, "through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he hath now received the atonement." "Having (found) redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of his sins," he cannot but rejoice, when he looks back on the horrible pit out of which he is delivered, when he sees "all his transgressions blotted out as a thick cloud;" he cannot but rejoice, whenever he looks on the state wherein he now is, "being justified freely, and having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." "For he that believeth hath the witness (of this) in himself:" Being now "a child of God by faith; because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying Abba, Father!" And "the Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God." He rejoiceth also, whenever he looks forward, "in hope of the glory that shall be revealed:" Yea, this his joy is full, and all his bones cry out, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy hath begotten me again to a living hope, of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for me."

7. And he who hath this *hope*, thus *full of immortality, in every thing gives thanks:* as knowing that *this* (whatsoever it is,) *is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning him.* From him, therefore, he *cheerfully* receives all, saying, "Good is the will of the Lord:" And whether the Lord giveth, or taketh away, equally "blessing the name of the Lord." For he hath "learned in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content." He knoweth "both how to be abased, and how to abound. Every where and in all things he is instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need." Whether in ease or pain, whether in sickness or health, whether in life or death, he giveth thanks from the ground of the heart to him, who orders it for good: knowing that as "every good gift cometh from above," so none but good can come from "the Father of Lights," into whose hands he has wholly committed his body and soul, as into the hands of a faithful Creator. He is therefore, *careful* (anxiously or uneasily careful) *for nothing:* as having "cast all his care on him that careth for him,—and in all things" resting on him, after "making his request known to him with thanksgiving."

8. For, indeed, he "prays without ceasing." It is given him "always to pray and not to faint." Not that he is always in the house of prayer; though he neglects no opportunity of being there. Neither is he always on his knees, although he often is, or on his face before the Lord his God. Nor yet is he always crying aloud to God, or calling upon him in words. For many times "the Spirit maketh intercession for him with groans that cannot be uttered:" But at all times the language of his heart is this, "Thou brightness of the eternal glory, unto thee is my mouth, though without a voice, and my silence speaketh unto thee." And this is true prayer, the lifting up the heart to God. This is the essence of prayer, and this alone. But his heart is ever lifted up to God at all times, and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much

less interrupted by any person or thing. In retirement, or company, in leisure, in business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down, or rise up, God "is in all his thoughts;" "he walks with God" continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon him, and every where "seeing him that is invisible."

9. And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in every thing giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, that he who loveth God, loves his brother also. And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself; he loves every man as his own soul. His heart is full of love to all mankind, to every child of "the Father of the spirits of all flesh." That a man is not personally known to him, is no bar to his love. No, nor that he is known to be such as he approves not, that he repays hatred for his good will. For he "loves his enemies," yea, and the enemies of God; "the evil and the unthankful." And if it be not in his power to do good to them that hate him, yet he ceases not to pray for them, though they continue to spurn his love, and "despitefully use him and persecute him."

10. For he is *pure in heart*. The love of God has purified his heart from all revengeful passions, from envy, malice, and wrath, from every unkind temper or malign affection. It hath cleansed him from pride and haughtiness of spirit, whereof alone cometh contention. And he hath now put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; so that he "forbears and forgives, if he had a quarrel against any; even as God in Christ hath forgiven him." And, indeed, all possible ground for contention, on his part, is utterly cut off. For none can take from him what he desires. Seeing he "loves not the world, nor any of the things of the world;" being now "crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him;" being dead to all that is in the world, both "to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the

eye, and the pride of life." For "all his desire is unto God," and to the remembrance of his name.

11. Agreeable to this his one desire, is the one design of his life, namely, "not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him." His one intention at all times and in all things is, not to please himself, but him whom his soul loveth. He has a single eye. And because "his eye is single, his whole body is full of light." Indeed, where the loving eye of the soul is continually fixed upon God, there can be no darkness at all, "but the whole is light; as when the bright shining of a candle doth enlighten the house." God then reigns alone. All that is in his soul is holiness to the Lord. There is not a motion in his heart, but is according to his will. Every thought that arises points to him, and is in obedience to the law of Christ.

12. And the tree is known by its fruits. For as he loves God, so he keeps his commandments. Not only some, or most of them, but all, from the least to the greatest. He is not content to "keep the whole law, and offend in one point;" but has in all points, "a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards man." Whatever God has forbidden, he avoids: whatever God has enjoined, he doth; and that whether it be little or great, hard or easy, joyous or grievous to the flesh. He "runs the ways of God's commandments," now he hath set his "heart at liberty." It is his glory so to do; it is his daily crown of rejoicing, to "do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven;" knowing it is the highest privilege of the angels of God, "of those that excel in strength, to fulfil his commandments, and hearken to the voice of his word."

13. All the commandments of God he accordingly keeps, and that with all his might. For his obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And, therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength. He continually presents his soul and body, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God; entirely, and without reserve, de-

voting himself, all he has, and all he is, to his glory. All the talents he has received, he constantly employs, according to his Master's will; every power and faculty of his soul, every member of his body. Once he *yielded* them *unto sin* and the devil, *as instruments of unrighteousness*: But now, *being alive from the dead, he yields* them all, *as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

14. By consequence, whatsoever he doth, it is all to the glory of God. In all his employments of every kind, he not only *aims* at this, (which is implied in having a single eye,) but actually *attains* it. His business and refreshments, as well as his prayers, all serve to this great end. Whether he sit in his house, or walk by the way, whether he lie down, or rise up, he is promoting in all he speaks or does, the one business of his life: Whether he put on his apparel, or labour, or eat and drink, or divert himself from too wasting labour, it all tends to advance the glory of God, by peace and good-will among men. His one invariable rule is this, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

15. Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder his "running the race that is set before him." He knows that vice does not lose its nature, though it becomes ever so fashionable; and remembers, that "every man is to give an account of himself to God." He cannot, therefore, even "follow a multitude to do evil." He cannot "fare sumptuously every day," or "make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." He cannot "lay up treasures upon earth," no more than he can take fire into his bosom. He cannot "adorn himself" (on any pretence) "with gold or costly apparel." He cannot join in, or countenance any diversion, which has the least tendency to vice of any kind. He cannot speak evil of his neighbour, no more than he can lie, either for God or man. He cannot utter an unkind word of any one; for love keeps the door of his lips. He cannot speak "idle words: no corrupt communication ever comes out of

his mouth," as is all that "which is not good to the use of edifying," nor "fit to minister grace to the hearers." But "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are just, or of good report," he thinks, and speaks, and acts, "adorning the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all things."

16. Lastly. As he has time, he "does good unto all men;" unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison;" but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth: To awaken those that sleep in death: To bring those who are awakened, to the atoning blood, that "being justified by faith," they may have "peace with God," and to provoke those who have peace with God, to abound more in love and in good works. And he is willing to "spend and be spent herein," "even to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith," so they may "all come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

17. These are the Principles and Practices of our Sect;—these are the Marks of a true Methodist. By these alone do those who are in derision so called, desire to be distinguished from other men. If any man say, "Why these are only the common, fundamental principles of Christianity!" "Thou hast said:" So I mean: this is the very truth; I know they are no other; and I would to God both thou and all men knew, that I, and all who follow my judgment, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common principles of Christianity: the plain, old Christianity that I teach, renouncing and detesting all other marks of distinction. And whosoever *is* what I *preach*, (let him be called what he will; for names change not the nature of things,) he is a Christian, not in *name* only, but in *heart* and in *life*. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God as revealed in

the written Word. He thinks, speaks, and lives according to the method laid down in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness, and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.

18. By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith, do we labour to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world, from all those whose minds or lives are not according to the Gospel of Christ. But from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all: Not from any, who sincerely follow after what they know they have not yet attained. No: whosoever doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. And I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that we be in no wise divided among ourselves. Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand. For opinions, or terms, et us not destroy the work of God. Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right-hand of fellowship. "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; let us strive together for the faith of the Gospel; walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:" Remembering, "there is one body and one spirit, even as we are called with one hope of our calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all!"

FINIS.

London: Printed at the Conference-Office, 14, City-Road,
By THOMAS CORDEUX, Agent.